V. KELLER'S LIST: THE SIX DISPUTED ISSUES

"What giants?" said Sancho Panza.

"Those thou seest there," answered his master, "with the long arms, and some have them nearly two leagues long."

"Look, your worship," said Sancho; "what we see there are not giants but windmills, and what seem to be their arms are the sails that turned by the wind make the millstone go."

"It is easy to see," replied Don Quixote, "that thou art not used to this business of adventures; those are giants; and if thou art afraid, away with thee out of this and betake thyself to prayer while I engage them in fierce and unequal combat."

So saying, he gave the spur to his steed Rocinante, heedless of the cries his squire Sancho sent after him, warning him that most certainly they were windmills and not giants he was going to attack. He, however, was so positive they were giants that he neither heard the cries of Sancho, nor perceived, near as he was, what they were, but made at them shouting, "Fly not, cowards and vile beings, for a single knight attacks you."[316]

It was a full moon night, and a man was intently searching for something in a clearing. A passerby stopped and asked if the man needed any help. "I have lost a diamond ring" said the man. The newcomer joined the search and after a while asked him, "Where exactly did you drop it?" The man replied, "Oh, the ring? I dropped it in the thicket, but it is dark over there; but I am searching for it here because it is bright here".

The Deobandi-Sunni dispute is more than a hundred and fifty years old; some issues are about rituals and practices and some others are about secondary áqīdah issues. Deobandis and other Wahābīs have a huge list of things they deem bidáh or shirk; but Sunnis make takfīr only on issues related to Essentials and cases of blasphemy. There are dozens of contentious issues between Sunnis and Deobandis/Wahābīs, but it is not clear how Keller came up with this shortlist of six issues, which he declares: "*six main áqīdah issues fought over by Barelwis and Deobandis*."

What is the basis and the source of this list?

Islām arrived in the subcontinent about a thousand years ago and until 1800s, Sunnis were united in India. Many saints and scholars have graced this region, and arguably, the most famous ones in latter times are Shaykh Aĥmad Sirhindi, Shāh Ábd al-Ĥaqq Dihlawī, Shāh Walīyullāh Dihlawi and Shāh Ábd al-Ázīz Dihlawī.

The family of Shāh Walīyullāh was among the most prominent scholarly families in early 1800s. His illustrious son Shāh Ábd al-Ázīz Dihlawī was a famous ĥadīth imām and a Ĥanafī jurist; he is respected by both Sunnis and Deobandis and they consider him a reliable and an authoritative scholar. Yet, it was his nephew,[317] Shāh Ismāýīl, who dissented from the ways of common Muslims – and indeed from the tradition of his forefathers – and introduced Wahābī beliefs and ideas in the subcontinent. Influenced by writings of Muĥammad ibn Ábd al-Wahhāb Najdī, he wrote *Taqwiyatu'l Īmān*, a harsh and abusive book, which caused a furore from the

[316] *Don Quixote*, Chapter 8. Translated to English in 1885 by John Ormsby (1829-1895).

[317] Shāh Walīyullāh had four sons: Shāh Ábd al-Ázīz, Shāh Ábd al-Qādir, Shāh Rafīýuddīn and Shāh Ábd al-Ghanī; the first two did not have male offspring; Shāh Rafīýuddīn had six sons: Muhammad Ýīsā, Muşţafā, Makhşūşullāh, Muĥammad Ĥusayn, Muĥammad Mūsā, Muĥammad Ĥasan, and all six of them were scholars. Shāh Ábd al-Ghani had one son Muĥammad Ismāýīl.

beginning and was the first major essay of Wahābī thought in India.[318] This book was refuted by many scholars and among the foremost who refuted this *fitnah* were Faḍl al-Ĥaqq Khayrābādī, Faḍl al-Rasūl Badāyūnī, Muftī Aĥmad Saýīd Naqshbandī[319] and Ismāýīl's own cousins, Shāh Makhşūşullāh Dihlawī and Shāh Mūsā Dihlawī – all of them students of Shāh Ábd al-Ázīz. Shāh Makhşūşullāh called the book *Tafwiyatu'l Īmān,* or the *Annihilation of Faith*. Ismāýīl followed his *Tafwiyat*, with more abominable works such as *Yak Rozi*, and *Yīđāĥ al-*Ĥaqq. Among the major ideas espoused by Ismāýīl:

- Rejection of taqlīd of imāms
- Exhortation of common people to derive rulings on their own from the Qur'ān and Ĥadīth
- That seeking intercession of Prophets and saints is polytheism
- Seeking help through intercessors (*istighātha, istiáānah, istimdād*) is polytheism
- Falsehood is included in Divine Power – and it is possible for Allāh táālā to lie
- That Allāh táālā can create billions of Muĥammad ﷺ in an instant even now
- It is heresy and ignorance to believe that the Creator does not have a direction
- Everyone in the creation (including prophets) is lower than a menial cobbler in the Presence of the Almighty
- If one's thinks about the Prophet ﷺ in prayer, it is worse than thinking about one's own bullock or donkey
- One should respect Prophets only as much as one would respect an elder brother
- Prophets are leaders similar to village headmen being head of the village

Post-modern apologists of Ismāýīl claim that he did not reject taqlīd or that his books were tampered – yet without an iota of shame, those very books are promoted by Deobandis. Some people may invoke Keller's fancy rule of printed books to subvert this issue – yet, Deobandi elders did not disagree with the contents of the book or disputed the attribution to Ismāýīl. Deobandis revere, respect and follow Ismāýīl Dihlawī and his ideas and defend his blasphemies – that is the biggest bone of contention. After Ismāýīl was killed, the tribulation had subsided for some time, until Rashid Gangohī revived it through his school at Deoband; his fatāwā are full of praise for Ismāýīl's book and dismisses the rumour that Ismāýīl had repented from some of those beliefs – the rumour, which caused Alahazrat to withhold from takfīr.

In his *Kawkabah al-Shihābiyyah*, Alahazrat mentioned 70 statements of this Ismāýīl and demonstrated the kufr of those statements; yet, he abstained from making takfīr of Ismāýīl because a rumour was afloat that Ismāýīl had repented from his heresy. Regardless, those statement ***are*** blasphemies and anybody who professes those beliefs shall become a kāfir.

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[318] See *Ismāýīl Dihlawī aur un ki Taqwiyatu'l Īmān* by Shaykh Abu'l Ĥasan Zayd Fārūqī Naqshbandī Dihlawī al-Az'harī.

[319] He was a prominent scholar and descendant of Imām Rabbānī Mujaddid Alf al-Thānī.

Deobandis furthered Ismāýīl's cause and in the course of defending his heresies, added blasphemies of their own. Scholars of Ahlu's Sunnah refuted them – and in those cases where it was unavoidable, they made takfīr of those people. Deobandis shot back defending their elders and slandering Sunni scholars; but they also did something which Sunnis did not do enough – they reached out to Sunni scholars outside the region and presented themselves as authentic Sunnis who dislike Wahābīs and follow Sufi traditions; and they presented their elders in an acceptable form – not discussing their heresies or their beliefs; and of course, *Muhannad* was always at hand to deceive the rest of the world. [320]

This is the background of the conflict. Deobandis active on the Internet may dispute this summary and vehemently disagree that they are not Wahābīs – but their Wahābism is evident from their books and fatāwā and continued support and promotion of Ismāýīl Dihlawī, his *Tafwiyatu'l Īmān* and other works. Ismāýīl's tract is certainly based on Shaykh Najdi's works; Shaykh Abu'l Ĥasan Zayd Fārūqī Dihlawī has conclusively proven in his work[321] and demonstrated that whole passages are translated verbatim and even chapter names are lifted from the Najdi's book.

Issues upon which Deobandis conflict with Sunnis can be grouped broadly thus:

1. ***Essentials of Religion:*** Qāsim Nānotwī said that ***khatamu'n nabiyyīn*** does not necessarily mean that our Master ﷺ is chronologically the final prophet, and if a prophet were to arrive after him, it would not affect the finality of his prophethood; Rashid Gangohī in a fatwā said that we should not make takfīr of a person who claims that Allāh táālā has lied [*wuqūú e kazib ke máanī durust ho gaye*]. Such examples are aplenty in that burnable book *Taqwiyatu'l Īmān*.[322]

2. ***Blasphemy:*** Ashraf Álī Thānawī claims that the knowledge of unseen possessed by the Prophet ﷺ is similar to that possessed by animals and madmen. Khalīl Aĥmad said that the expanse of the knowledge of the world is proven for Satan by texts, and no such evidence for RasūlAllāh ﷺ exists and it is polytheism to prove the same knowledge for RasūlAllāh ﷺ. Maĥmūd al-Ĥasan in his dirge for Gangohī committed a number of blasphemies.

3. ***Secondary Áqīdah* Issues**: Deobandis do not accept the Prophet ﷺ was given extensive knowledge of unseen; that he ﷺ was a man just like us, citing the last verse of Sūrah Kahf; Deobandis do not permit *istighātha*, and deem it shirk. Calling upon RasūlAllāh ﷺ for help as a form of tawassul is deemed polytheism by Deobandis following other Wahābīs, even though such prayers are found in Ĥadīth. Ismāýīl claimed that RasūlAllāh ﷺ is dead and became dust. First, Ismāýīl and then Gangohī and his followers claim that it is possible for Allāh táālā to lie.[323] Ismāýīl Dihlawī's books also advocate anthropomorphic beliefs.

4. ***Culture of Disrespect:*** Mentioning the Prophet ﷺ and Awliyā'a without due respect – a trend set by Ismāýīl and his *Tafwiyat*. Deobandis routinely use ugly analogies to illustrate their point, thereby exposing

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[320] Even the faux rage against the founder of Wahābism, showed by Khalīl Aĥmed in *Muhannad* was retracted later; which will not spare those who attested that fable as authentic áqīdah of Deobandis – nor do they note this retraction in newer versions.

[321] *Maulavi Ismāýīl Dihlawī aur Unki Taqwiyatu'l Īmān*, Mawlānā Abu'l Ĥasan Zayd.

[322] See Appendix C for scans of those passages upon which Sunni scholars made takfīr.

[323] Alahazrat says that it is kufr according to jurists, but scholars of kalām withhold from takfīr.

the filth within themselves. One famous Deobandi debater, Ţāhir Gayāvī compared reciting salutation upon the Prophet ﷺ in the masjid loudly, to feces in a plastic bag; the same person asserting that Allāh táālā can lie, used the analogy of a young man who can commit adultery but abstains from it. In *Juhd al-Muqill*, Maĥmūd al-Ĥasan claims that it is in the Divine Power of Allāh táālā do all ugly or evil things [*qudrah álā al-qabāyiĥ*] – and it is mumkin dhātī for Allāh táālā.[324]

5. ***Scorning Practices as Bidáh/Shirk***: Deobandis scorn and ridicule celebration of Mawlids; or prayers known as *fātiĥah* – donating reward of good deeds to the deceased; including that of saints known as *úrs*. Thānawī claims that describing RasūlAllāh ﷺ as 'remover of affliction' is polytheism. Deobandis deem it an act of faith to possess *Tafwiyatu'l Īmān* and to read it.

6. ***Exaggerated Praise of Deobandi Elders***: Sometimes, such praise borders on blasphemy and escape that ruling only because they claim them to be dreams. Khalīl Aĥmad in his *Barāhīn* writes that in one such dream RasūlAllāh ﷺ was speaking in Urdu and when asked, he said that it was because of his association with the scholars of Deoband; in another dream, RasūlAllāh ﷺ was cooking food for Gangohī; Maĥmūd al-Ĥasan in his elegy to Gangohī belittles the prophets Ýīsā ؑ and Yūsuf ؑ comparing them with his own master; and that Gangohī was second to RasūlAllāh ﷺ; he goes on further and describes Gangohī as *sustainer of the creation – murabbi e khalāyiq*. This kind of exaggeration reaches grotesque proportions: when a follower writes to Thānawī that he was reciting *lā ilāha illā Allāh, Ashraf Álī RasūlAllāh* in a dream and then *Allahumma şallī álā Ashraf Álī* in wakefulness; instead of rebuking him, Thānawī reassures him that it is a comforting event.

7. ***Mistakes in Translations and Fatāwā***: Rashid Gangohī rules that it merits reward [*thawāb*] to eat the house crow; the verses of the Qur'ān are translated recklessly in Thānawi's and other translations disregarding the esteem of Allāh táālā or his prophets; Gangohī deems that the phrase ***raĥmatun li'l áālamīn,*** is not restricted to RasūlAllāh ﷺ, and others such as awliyā'a can also be described as ***raĥmatun li'l áālamīn***.

8. ***Hypocrisy and Self-Contradition of Deobandis***: This is the defining characterstic of Deobandis – they have a book, an áqīdah and a fatwā for all seasons. When they meet Sunni scholars outside the subcontinent, they claim that their áqīdah is described in *Muhannad*; but in their fatāwā and Urdu books, they scorn those very things as bidáh or shirk.

   The ugliest form of their hypocrisy is the exaggerated praise [*ghuluw*] of their own elders – a number of things which they scorn as polytheism or innovation when said about Prophets and Awliyā'a, is claimed as a praiseworthy attribute of their own elders. In an even bizzare twist, when Deobandi muftīs were asked about statements of their elders, without mentioning their names, they ruled them kāfir – yet, they obstinately defend them and accuse Sunnis of being unfair if they issue the same fatwā. Self-contradiction of Deobandis is a chronic problem – sometimes, a certain belief or action is shirk; and at other times it is not; this contradiction is not only between two different people, but in the fatawā of the same person.

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[324] *Juhd al-Muqill*, p59, The Seventh Proem; also in *Tadhkiratu'l Khalīl,* p146, that stealing, drinking wine, ignorance and oppression are included in Divine Power.

Slander of Sunni Scholars: Ĥusayn Aĥmad Tāndwī wrote *Shihāb al-Thāqib*, in defence of Deobandis, but is also a compendium of insults and imprecations against Alahazrat. Similarly, Murtazā Ĥasan Chāndpūrī and others wrote booklets and pamphlets attacking the person of Alahazrat, in their attempt to divert the focus from their own flaws. Abu'l Ĥasan Nadwī resorted to bald-faced lies in his biographical notice on Alahazrat and Sunni scholars who refuted the heresy of Ismāýīl Dihlawī smearing them as innovators – Taqī Uthmanī made a similar attempt in his answer to an Arab scholar inquiring about Aĥmad Riđā Khān, answering innocently, that 'Barelwis' make takfīr of Deobandis because they forbid polytheistic practices.

9. ***Blind Support and Defence of Deobandi Elders***: including their blasphemies. Even if a hundred explicit proofs are presented, they try to find some ambiguous or obscure passage in a book and generalise that it is the general áqīdah of all scholars of Ahl as-Sunnah. Manżūr Númānī's *Faysla Kun Munazara* is touted as the last word in the debate,[325] even though it is full of falsehoods and misrepresentations similar to Keller's *Iman, Kufr, and Takfir*. In an attempt to exonerate their elders, they rush recklessly where even illiterate Muslims fear to tread.

Sunni scholars make *takfīr* of Deobandis only in the first two cases and deem them heretics and misguided for the rest of their stultiloquence. The last case however, is pending examination: if a person knowingly defends explicit blasphemies, then he too shall be judged as an apostate, because:

> Among things that cause apostasy is one's being concordant with [and approving of] disbelief, even if it is implied; for example, if a kāfir wants to accept Islām, and asks a Muslim to instruct the testimony of faith, and if that Muslim does not do it, or says "Wait until I am done with my work or finish my sermon," [if he is a preacher]; here, it is as if he has suggested [the kāfir] to not become a Muslim...[326]

Mawlānā Aĥmad Saýīd Każmī writes:

> I have mentioned presently that the fundamental difference and reasons for the dispute between Deobandis and Ahl as-Sunnah are those passages in which there is blasphemy against Allāh táālā and His Messenger ﷺ. Deobandis say that these statements are not disrespectful or insulting – Sunnis say that the insult and denigration in them is explicit...[327]

Many statements of Deobandis fall in multiple categories above. It should be noted that we do not include weird anecdotes of Deobandi elders, like the lewd stories narrated by Thānawī or such things reported about Gangohī or Nānotwī, mentioned in their own works; these are personal shortcomings and only show that they were ornery people lionised by their followers.

A detailed review of these cases is beyond the scope of this book, but the objective of mentioning them here is to expose the preposterousness of Keller's claim that the main disputed issues are the ones mentioned in his list. Regardless, let us examine Keller's understanding of these issues in the context of the Deobandi-Sunni conflict; indeed, these are disputed issues, but they are not the main ones per se, but because of the number of underlying reasons as we shall see:

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[325] In-sha'Allāh, I have the intention of writing a refutation of that screed in the future, Allāh táālā is a Sufficient Helper.

[326] *Iýlām*, p31.

[327] *Al-Ĥaqq al-Mubīn,* p15, Sayyid Aĥmed Saýīd Kāżmī.